

# Historic Hills Corridor trying to <sup>108</sup> be named an 'Iowa Great Place'

By Bill Howes  
Associate Editor

On Monday, Sept. 19, a detailed presentation on the Historic Hills Corridor was given to the Iowa Great Places Citizens Advisory Committee at Vision II Theater in Chariton. The presentation was given in an attempt to get Historic Hills selected as an Iowa Great Place.

Approximately 40 people attended the presentation, which was made possible through the cooperation of Vision II Manager, William Laverty, and the Chariton Arts and Recreation Board. Both provided the use of the theater for the presentation.

The presentation was divided into 11 segments, seven of which focused on dimensions formulated by the Iowa Great Places Selection Committee. The seven dimensions were: unique sense of place, engaging experiences, rich social fabric, vital economy, pleasing environment, strong foundation and creative culture.

Representatives from the different counties in Historic Hills were present to speak about each dimension

and give a slide presentation with each. The representatives were given one hour to explain why the Historic Hills Corridor was an Iowa Great Place.

Several representatives from Chariton Valley Planning and Development, which coordinates the Historic Hills Corridor project, were present. They were Executive Director, Tracy Daugherty Miller, Project Coordinator, John McCurdy, and Marketing Director, Kathleen Chester.

The Historic Hills Corridor is a vast region that's made up of nine counties in southern Iowa. The counties which are in it include: Clarke, Decatur, Lucas, Wayne, Monroe, Appanoose, Davis, Van Buren and Wapello.

Initially, 149 applications from all over Iowa were sent in to the Great Places Selection Committee for places trying to be named an Iowa Great Place. The applications were narrowed down to 50 places, of which Historic Hills was one, and of these, ultimately three will be chosen as an Iowa Great Place.

The three Iowa Great Places will be announced at a convention at Hancher Auditorium in Iowa City

Tuesday, Oct. 11. The three places selected will in turn receive assistance from all 18 state agencies and the Iowa Lottery will also make a scratch ticket signifying each place selected as an Iowa Great Place.

Three members of the Great Places Citizen Advisory Board were also present including Chairman, Bill Menner, and board members, Terry L. Lynch and Rita Vargas. Menner spoke to the audience.

"This is a really great experience for us. The governor's initiative to identify great places is easy because there's so many great places in Iowa. We're glad to be here and wish you the best of luck," he said.

Chariton Chamber Executive Director Sharon Kline gave the opening welcome and spoke about how

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Vision II Theater was started. She stated that it was started in mid-February 1996 when the temperature was a frigid minus 20 degrees and with the help of over 75 volunteers, it opened about six weeks later. "Similar to the cooperation we experienced with our theater, you will find the same type of dedication and cooperation is prevalent among the counties

comprising Historic Hills. We work together to make southern Iowa the very best it can be to live, work and play and have found that what is good for one is good for all," Kline said.

McCurdy spoke next and gave an overview of the Historic Hills Corridor. "Historic Hills is a unique and distinct region both geographically and culturally in southern Iowa. It has many recreational opportunities and a strong foundation of small businesses and industry," he said.

He also spoke about having community entryway signage in the Historic Hills Corridor and said that 41 entryway signs in 17 communities have been funded through the Federal Highway Administration and local matches. For this \$400,000 plus project, over \$130,000 has been provided in local match money with the remainder coming from a transportation enhancement grant.

Brenda DeVore, Manager of the Prairie Trails Muse-

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um of Wayne County, spoke about unique sense of place. She said there are 13 museums in the Corridor working to preserve the history of the area. She also spoke about historic features and sites of Historic Hills including the Mormon Trail, which literally touches each county in the corridor.

DeVore also said that Van Buren County has a preserved site on the Underground Railroad called the Pearson House. Appanoose County is currently researching two homes that were part of the Underground Railroad as well.

Denice Gradeless of the Albia Chamber of Commerce spoke about engaging experiences in Historic Hills. She said that many fun events and festivals are held throughout the Corridor including Pancake Days in Centerville, Pioneer Days, Old Settlers celebration in Corydon, Restoration Days, Cruizin' Albia and the All-Iowa Corvette Weekend in Chariton.

There are also various types of racing which can be enjoyed throughout Historic Hills. In addition, there are cemetery, barn and

garden tours held along with rodeos and fishing tournaments. Lifelong learning is also very prevalent with Graceland University in Lamoni and Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa and Centerville.

Many active Arts Councils provide an opportunity to learn how to quilt, dance and paint. For those with a thirst for nostalgia, there are over 180 antique shops found throughout Historic Hills.

Elizabeth Simpson of Clarke County Development spoke about rich social fabric. Simpson stated that six of the nine counties in Historic Hills have seen a population growth over the last 10 years and that the current population in Historic Hills is 107,600.

Wayne County has seen a large growth in its Amish population. Lucas County has experienced a large growth in its Ukrainian population and Clarke County has seen a large increase in its Hispanic population.

Jason White of the Appanoose Economic Development Corporation spoke about the vital economy of Historic Hills. "Land is the bedrock that's always anchored the economy in the Historic Hills

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region. It provides many families in the region with their primary source of income," he said.

White said the average farm size in Historic Hills decreased by one acre, 312-311, from 1997-2002. During this period, the average farm size statewide increased from 334-350 acres.

White said with the recent approval of the Honey Creek State Park project, Historic Hills will continue to grow as a region for outdoor recreation. "The park will not only be a statewide asset but also a regional destination for outdoor fun," he said.

Next, 2002 Chariton Citizen of the Year Gert Patterson spoke about Historic Hills' pleasing environment. She said Historic Hills contains over 86,000 acres of public land which includes many outdoor recreational activities.

Donna Duerr of the Arbor Inn Bed and Breakfast in Leon spoke about Historic Hills' strong foundation. "Underlying and supporting a pleasing environment is a strong foundation," she said.

Duerr spoke about the various transportation connections in Historic Hills such as Interstate 35 and Hwy. 69. She also spoke about the regional transit facilities such as Amtrak, the Southern Iowa trolleys and 10-15 out of Ottumwa. She said there are nine hospitals, 27 fire departments and eight municipal airports in the Historic

Hills region.

Duerr said there's continual support provided by service organizations and citizens of all ages throughout the Historic Hills communities. "Public support is vital to the survival of any region," she said.

Karen Spargur of Bloomfield Mainsreet spoke about Creative Culture. "Creativity is not only a valuable skill but also a necessity in Historic Hills. People of Historic Hills have worked hard to preserve the culture while welcoming new people and ideas and finding innovative solutions to problems," she said.

Next, Simpson and McCurdy spoke about areas for partnership during which they spoke about projects now underway in the region. One project involves the Ritz Theater in Centerville, formerly a movie theater that's being converted to a center for the performing arts. Work is also underway to rebuild Mallory Castle in Chariton into both a welcome center and an education center.

An effort is also being made to purchase the R & R Ranch in Clarke County and develop it into a family vacation spot. "We want it to be a place where people can have an Old Western experience that includes fishing, camping and Old West shootouts," Simpson said.

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**Gert Patterson of Chariton speaks during the presentation on the Historic Hills Corridor given to the Iowa Great Places Citizens Advisory Committee at Vision II Theater in Chariton Monday, Sept. 19. Patterson spoke about the pleasing environment that Historic Hills has to offer.**